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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9630
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 5930
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 3247
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 7094
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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 1638
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 1632
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 1729
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 3853
RUEHQD/AMEMBASSY QUITO 4272
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 8820
RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS LA PAZ 001654

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR WHA/AND LPETRONI
COMMERCE FOR JANGLIN
TREASURY FOR SGOOCH

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PGOV BL

SUBJECT: SANTA CRUZ PREFECT PREDICTS WIN FOR AUTONOMY

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Santa Cruz Prefect Ruben Costas told the Ambassador June 19 that he believed six of Bolivia's nine departments would vote "yes" in the July 2 autonomy referendum. He expressed frustration with the GOB's "double talk," referring to President Morales' recent decision to withdraw his support for autonomy, and commented that his relations with the GOB were "cold." Costas speculated that if autonomy received strong backing, and if Morales' Movement Toward Socialism party failed to win the two-thirds vote needed to control the Constituent Assembly, the GOB could harden its position on a range of issues - and perhaps urge supporters into the streets. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) In a June 19 meeting with the Ambassador, Santa Cruz Prefect Ruben Costas said he expected six of Bolivia's nine departments - Santa Cruz, Tarija, Beni, Pando, Cochabamba, and Potosi - to vote "yes" in the July 2 autonomy referendum.

He said 70 to 80 percent of Santa Cruz inhabitants favored autonomy, with the proportion even higher in Beni and Pando, and suggested that even La Paz could endorse the proposal.

¶3. (SBU) Costas expressed frustration with the GOB's "double talk," referring to President Morales' June 17 decision to withdraw his support for autonomy and urge party bases to vote against it. The prefect commented that his relations with the GOB were "cold" and noted that Vice President Garcia Linera's attempts to "soften" them had yielded little constructive dialogue. According to Costas, Morales perceives Santa Cruz as a "threat" and believes the department may pose the only real challenge to his government, particularly given the weakness of opposition parties.

¶4. (SBU) Costas speculated that if autonomy received strong backing, and if Morales' Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party failed to win the two-thirds vote needed to control the Constituent Assembly, the GOB could harden its position on a range of issues - and perhaps urge supporters into the streets. Costas said he doubted the MAS would win as much as 54 percent of the vote, the total garnered in December's presidential election, and pointed out that this could be

perceived as a major blow to the Morales administration, perhaps forcing GOB officials to take more radical positions and resort to more familiar means (i.e., mass demonstrations) of promoting change.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Costas seems confident that Santa Cruz and up to a majority of Bolivia's nine geographical departments will opt for autonomy on July 2. Far less clear is whether Evo Morales' MAS candidates will garner as much as the 54 percent vote for Constituent Assembly delegates that he achieved in last December's presidential contest. End comment.

GREENLEE